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SUBJECT: Latvia elects its new president: Valdis Zatlers

Ref: a) Riga 411 b) Riga 392 c) Riga 322

11. (U) On May 31, after an hour-long debate, the Saeima (Latvian parliament) elected Latvia's new president - Valdis Zatlers, candidate of the coalition parties, with 58 votes. 39 lawmakers voted for the opposition's candidate, Aivars Endzins, one member voted for neither candidate and two members were absent. (Bio information on Zalters in ref b)

12. (U) Although the ballot was secret, it is assumed that the 58 votes in favor of Zatlers consist of the votes of all members of the coalition party (57) and one vote of the ethnic Russian opposition party For Human Rights in the United Latvia (PCTVL). Endzins appears to have received all the votes of the parliamentary factions of Harmony Center (SC) and New Era ( JL) and a few from PCTVL. By law, the start of Zatler's four year term as President will be set by the Saeima. (ref c) It is widely expected, though, that this will occur on July 8 as the term of the current president, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, expires on July 7.

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